

# How a Historic Thai City Became a Global Blueprint for Urban Transformation

Deconstructing the Success of Nakhon Si Thammarat



# From Ancient Heritage to a Global Smart City Icon

## A Beacon of Tradition

- A historic city with a cultural lineage tracing back over 1200 years.
- Home to 29 temples and 9 masjids, including the great temple, a finalist for World Heritage status.
- A major destination for spiritual and cultural tourism, playing a key role in Thailand's economy.



## A Model of Innovation

- Globally acclaimed winner of smart city awards, including recognition from South Korea and the World Smart City Expo.
- A benchmark case for people-centric development presented at international forums.



# The First Layer: Making Governance Tangible with the 'My City' App

The app turns citizens into active participants in governance. It is a platform that empowers residents to report issues directly, bridging the gap between citizens and their government.

**70%** Over 70% of the population belongs to the platform.

**38,000** Around 38,000 complaints resolved within the last three years.

**\$500,000** Annual savings in operational costs (e.g., paper) by using the platform.

## The Old Way



**15 Days to Fix a Pothole.**

## The New Way



**Reduced to 48 Hours.**

# Applying Smart Solutions to the City's Toughest Challenges



## Winning Against Water

- **Problem:** Every year the city faces flood problems.
- **Solution:** Real-time flood warning system with publicly accessible water level cameras.
- **Mechanism:** Residents have a 10-hour 'golden period' from when water is high in the mountains until it reaches the city. They see the situation with their own eyes—green, yellow, red levels—and execute their own evacuation plans. No big announcement needed.



## Hospital on Wheels

- **Problem:** 60,000 patients, many elderly or with disabilities, cannot easily come to the city hospital.
- **Solution:** A smart bus equipped with doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and high-speed internet travels to communities, bringing healthcare to the doorstep.
- **Impact:** Serving around 4,000 patients who are 'very, very happy' with the service.



## Metaverse Classrooms

- **Problem:** Making frontier technology relevant and accessible for education.
- **Solution:** Using AR and VR in real classrooms for 11,000 students. Trained 300 teachers to develop 1,500 digital lessons.
- **Mechanism:** Gained public support not by explaining the tech, but by bringing parents to the classroom to see the benefits for their children. The people then asked the mayor to invest more.

# Peeling the Second Layer: The Philosophy Behind the Projects

**“Our smart city is a people-centric smart city. We started with the problems of the people, and then we discussed, and then we put people together and worked together from a small scale, and then created in the large scale success.”**

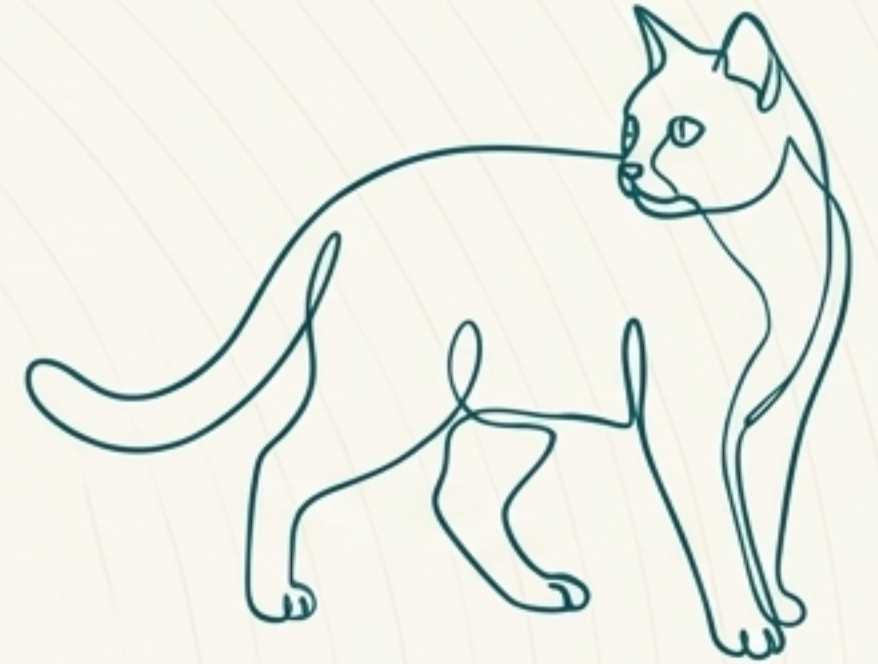
— Mayor Kanop

The visible innovations are not driven by technology, but by a deep-seated philosophy. The goal was to create an “eatable Smart City”—one where complex technology is digested into simple, tangible benefits that every citizen can understand and use.



# The Art of Leading "Clever Cats"

The most challenging thing for me is turning the old city to become a smart city... it's a behavioral change. Our people are from the South, with very strong opinions, very independent. We are like cats.



**“You drag a cat forward, it will go backward. You push a cat forward, it will try to go backward. It resists change if you push or force. But if you are a stupid cat, if a mayor is a stupid cat, all the clever cats want to follow.”**

**“Don’t Push, Show”:** “I cannot change the behavior of people, no way. But I can show them... I just shut my mouth and do my things.”

**“Action as Communication”:** “Your action will be a drum that people beat. You cannot beat a drum by yourself. Once they beat it, then they believe it.”

**“Empowerment Over Mandates”:** “I just provide options... You want to report a problem using paper or using a mobile phone? Which one is better? They think mobile phone is better. Let’s do it.”

# Peeling the Third Layer: Building a Collaborative Ecosystem

Success was not achieved in isolation. It required a robust partnership model combining local knowledge, technical expertise, and strategic guidance.

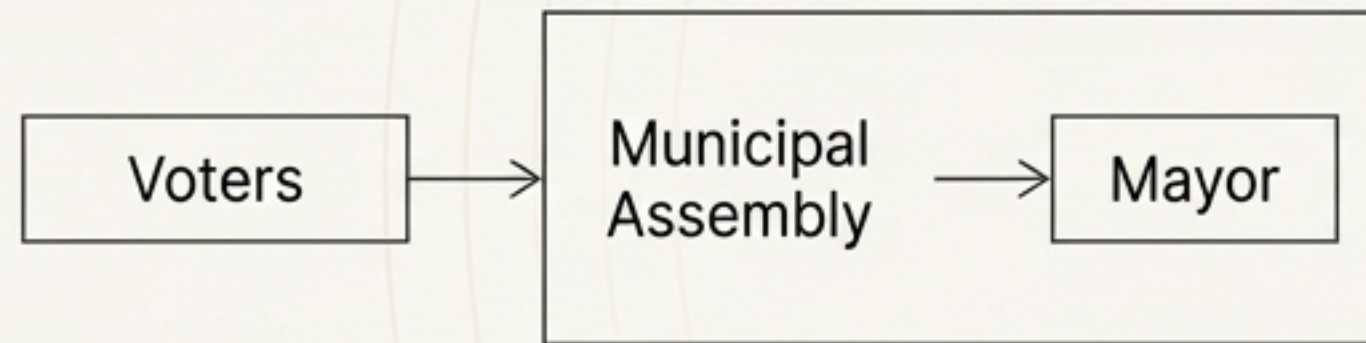
## The Partnership Formula



This Public-Private Partnership model is critical. It ensures that solutions are tailored, efficient, and sustainable, leveraging the unique strengths of each partner.

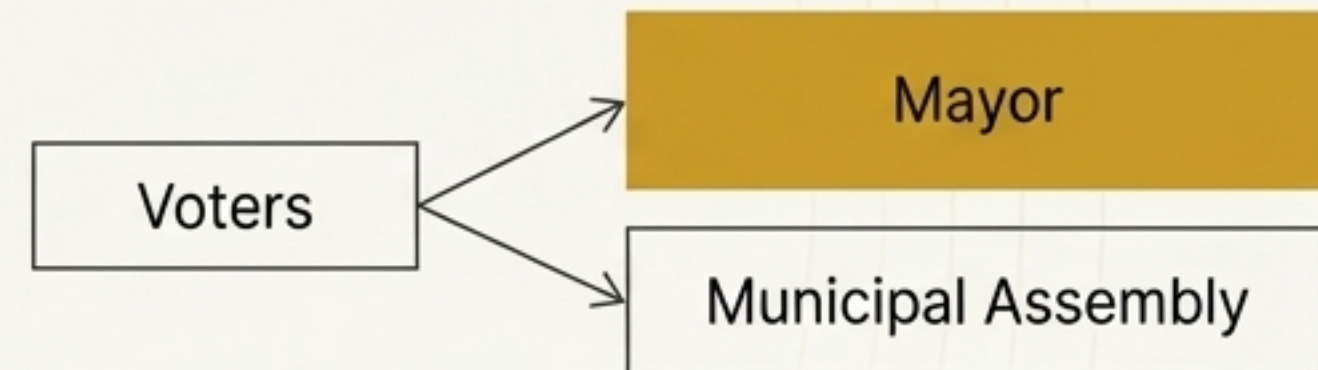
# Peeling to the Core: The Foundation of Empowered Local Governance

The 1997 Thai Constitution initiated major decentralization reforms, fundamentally changing the structure and power of local governments.



## Before 1997: Indirect Election

Mayors were chosen by the municipal assembly. Power was diffuse, leading to short tenures as assembly members rotated the mayorship. This limited accountability to voters.



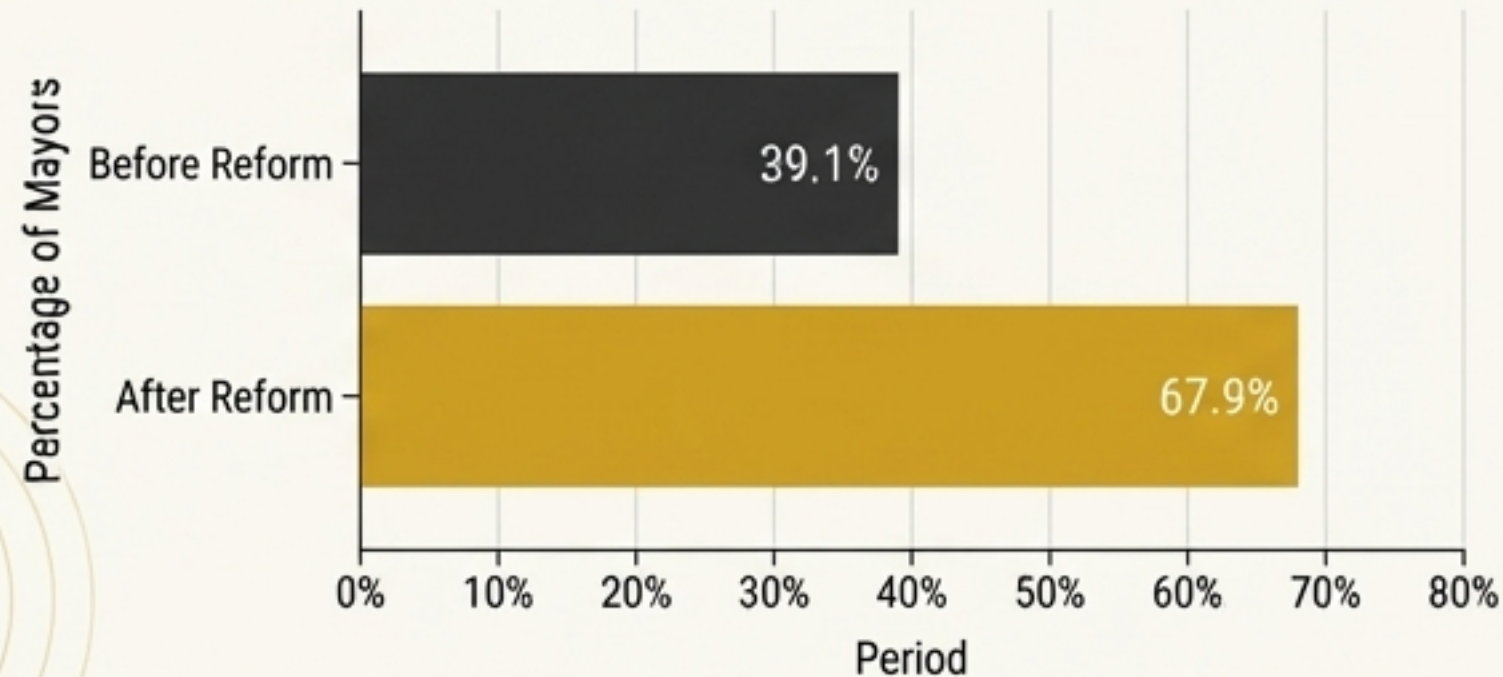
## After 1997: Direct Election & "Strong Mayor" System

Directly elected mayors gained executive power, secure tenures, and control over larger budgets and personnel. This created a new system designed for stability and direct accountability to citizens.

# The Measurable Impact of Reform: A New Era of Local Leadership

## Increased Stability of Political Leadership

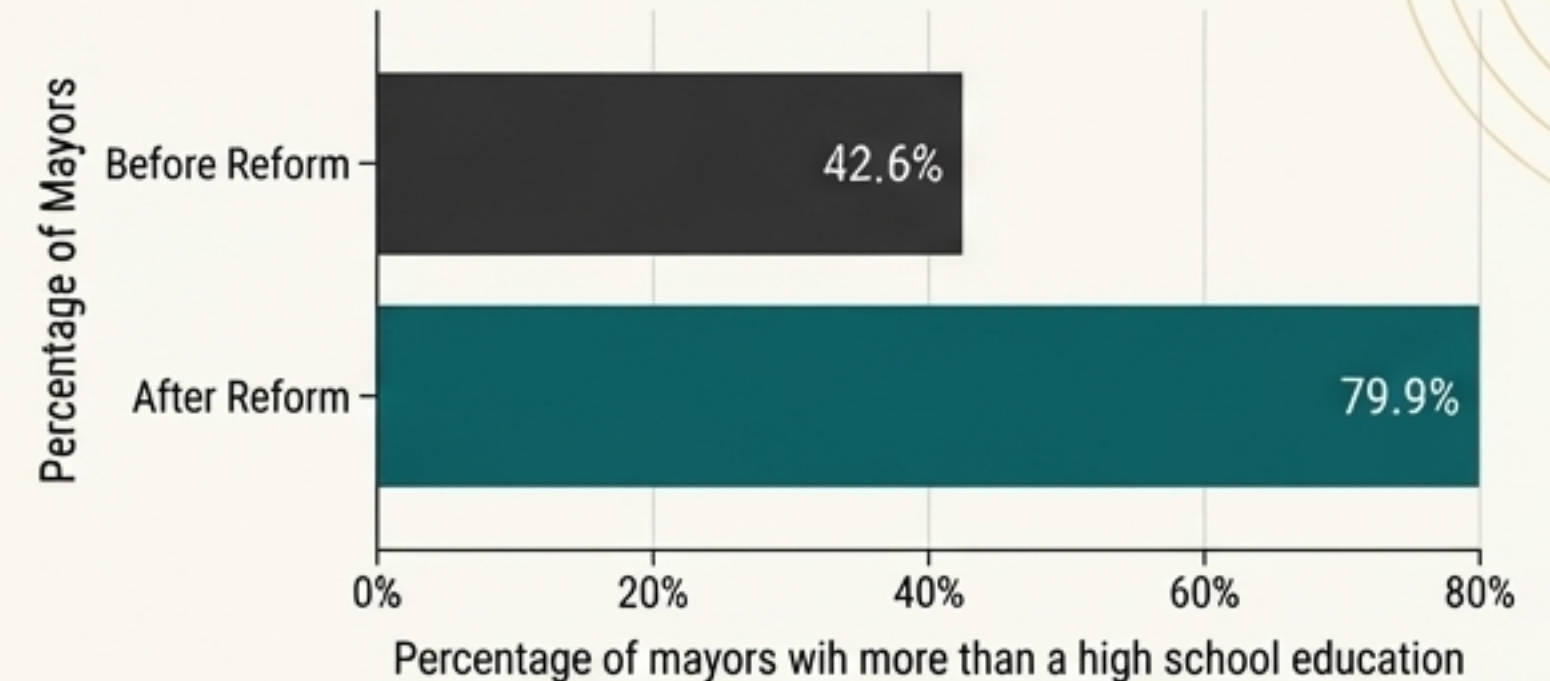
Mayors' Tenures Before and After Decentralization



**Insight:** Direct elections created more secure tenures, allowing mayors to implement long-term, visionary projects.

## Higher Quality of Political Leadership

Education Level of Mayors



**Insight:** The reformed system attracted and elevated more highly educated leaders.

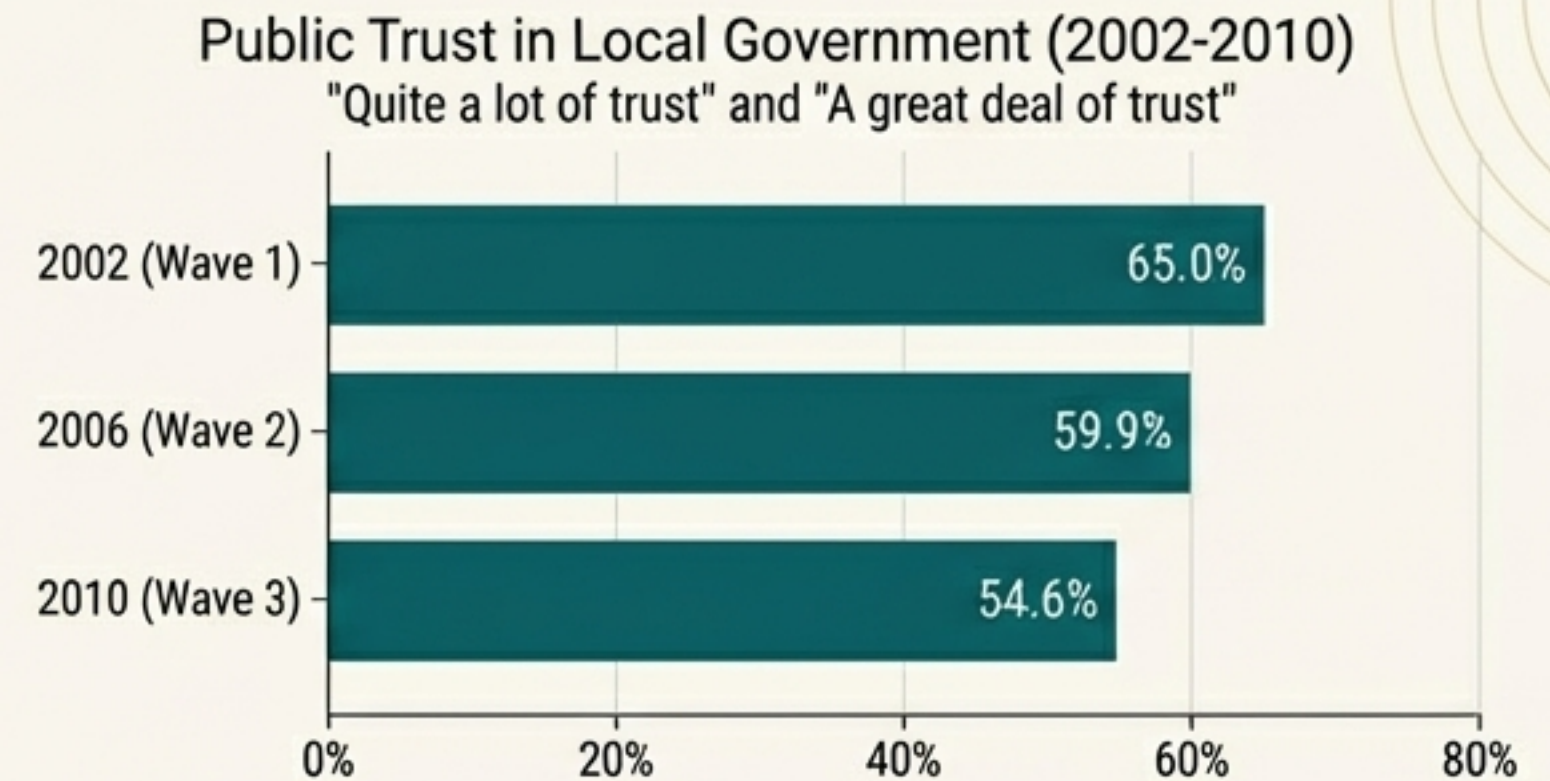
# A Virtuous Cycle: How Reform Boosted Participation and Trust

## Rising Political Participation



**Insight:** Decentralization and compulsory voting correlated with a significant and sustained rise in citizen engagement in local politics.

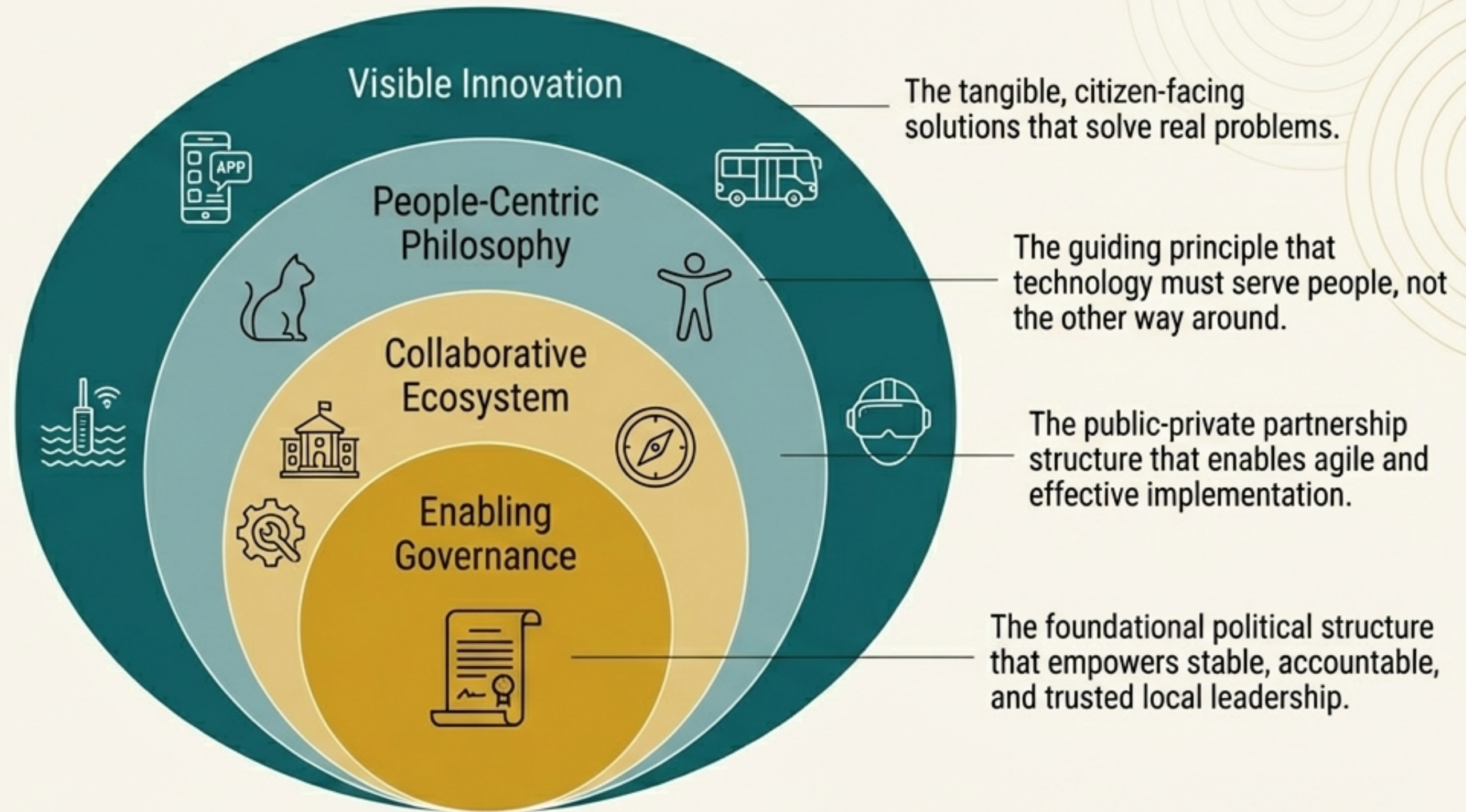
## Growing Trust in Local Government



**Insight:** While national political polarization impacted trust levels across the board, the strong, direct link between voters and mayors created a new framework for local accountability.

# The Nakhon Si Thammarat Blueprint: A Model of Layered Transformation

## Onion Model



Nakhon Si Thammarat's success is not just a story about technology. It is a replicable model where visible outcomes are built upon a clear philosophy, enabled by a dynamic ecosystem, and grounded in fundamental governance reform.

# The Ultimate Justification: Good Governance is Winning Politics

Mayor Kanop, serving his second term, is living evidence of the model's political viability. The tools of the smart city are not just for efficiency; they are tools for building a deep, responsive, and resilient relationship with the electorate.

**"I told them, fellow mayors in the Philippines, you do this, you win the next election. That's it. Because city mayors, they are from election, right? The final thing for a politician is the next election. So I prove it. This is my second term, so I'm a living evidence."**

